

Behind the Grin of the Peanut Farmer from Georgia

CARTER, From F1

embarrassed about saying even this much and begins to hesitate. "It used to be that I would only pray once a day, at night, and on Sunday. Now, well, I'm not going to finish that sentence... you're a reporter."

He goes on to say that prayer has helped in every part of his life. That he uses prayer in ways to solve everyday problems. He says that when he and his wife, Rosalynn, have arguments, he will take her by the hand, lead her into the bedroom and they will kneel by the bed and pray aloud to God, each one telling his or her side of the story. Then they will embrace each other.

"I have a very hard time talking about certain things," he says, "communicating certain feelings." For many who have not been brought up in a religious environment this may seem odd. But for those who have roots in the small Southern town atmosphere, being religious is "just normal." Talking and praying to God is no different to them than going to psychiatrists, marriage counselors, EST, transcendental meditation, group therapy or Esalen may be to others.

Carter is aware that there are those who will think the religious bit is hokey. "I have enough confidence that the truth will prevail," he says simply. He looks uncomfortable, almost squirms in his seat. "I don't like to explain something I haven't thought out."

What Jimmy Carter has thought out is that many people are turned off by the old politics, Watergate, stress, issues, and now they simply want to make it through the night.

He stands in front of them calmly, serenely, quietly, talks to them, doesn't feed off their fears or their prejudices. When he speaks, they listen quietly. When he finishes, many decide that what he has said was neither divisive nor hysterical. They quietly get up and quietly go off to vote for him. Ask almost anyone you find at a Jimmy Carter event and you'll hear something like, "I don't know why I like him. I just like him."

Carter staffers say that black musician Percy Sledge had the best description of Carter's appeal. They tell a story about an upper-middle class, all-white fundraiser last year in Atlanta where Sledge showed up. Many guests got up individually and told why they were for Carter. Finally Sledge got up reluctantly and stood a bit uncomfortably in front of the group. "I'm for Jimmy Carter," he began, then mumbled a bit, "because, uh, because he's got his... together."

People like Carter because he doesn't take advantage of their stress. He's telling them everything can be alright. Not in any prophetic way. Just makin' sense.

He will say that he personally doesn't believe in abortion but he's against an amendment to the Constitution to outlaw abortion and he says he's not sure when abortion becomes murder. His audiences seem to like that. He tells them he wants to support Israel but he'll never send soldiers there. He says 90 per cent of the people on welfare can't work and deserve to be treated with compassion. The other 10 per cent should be given an opportunity to work and be taken off the welfare rolls. The people nod. That makes sense to them. He says he believes in equality for everybody. And he says preferential treatment for women and blacks is not equality. But he outlines plans to help women and blacks achieve.

There are those who feel these "positions" prove that he is being wishy washy and that he comes down on both sides of issues to attract the most voters. But the crowds don't seem to think so. To them he's just makin' sense. And the Democratic primary returns are backing him up.

"I just think," said one young black man at a college Carter visited, "that if he were President he'd do the right thing."

There is a feeling among Carter's detractors that because he seems to span so many issues, touch so many bases, that he has to be a phony. He is an enigma to many people, inconsistent, multi-faceted, full of apparent contradictions, complex, with an amazing capacity for abstraction. He's what Kris Kristofferson would call a "walking contradiction." (For those who care, he's a Libra.) He seems to be all things to all people, to blacks and blue-collar white people at the same time, take conflicting ideas and issues, conflicting people and ideologies and make them strangely compatible.

One of the things that troubles many Carter observers, that makes even those who really want to believe in him, edgy, is all this love, human kindness, compassion, honesty, sincerity stuff. It is hard to swallow. For anybody. Even George Wallace said last week that when people start talking about how honest they are it's time to hold on to your wallet.

Along with the stereotype of the Southerner as the good Christian, the family man, the gentleman, there is the more profound stereotype of the Faulkner or Tennessee Williams character. It is the person who uses his piety as a facade for deviousness, hypocrisy, mendacity.

Carter's campaign tactics, which even his closest friends and advisers have sometimes objected to — supposedly courting Lester Maddox and George Wallace, running allegedly vicious campaign TV ads against his opponents, visiting white segregationist schools — are pointed to by his enemies to prove how untrustworthy he really is. Carter denies any devious tactics. And there may be no way to know whether Jimmy Carter is a truly honest man. But it does seem only fair to examine his record.

There have been numerous accusations about Carter's position on race, for instance. They say he is two-faced. Southern observers say, however, that in the early 1950s Carter was the only man in his town in Plains, Ga., who refused to join the White Citizens Council.

He was also the only person who fought for integrating his church.

Carter was quoted recently in Newsweek magazine as saying to a black leader in Atlanta, "You won't like my

campaign but you'll be proud of my record as governor." His record is considered good, even by his enemies and especially by many blacks in Georgia. Now, in every place he runs he has a large proportion of the black vote.

Carter's friends say that he can be the most hardnosed of opponents and will go to great lengths to defeat someone he is running against. Vituperative is a word you hear often about his methods of operation against those he thinks are wrong. And he knows how to get his digs in. When he talks about George Wallace he says, "I feel sorry for him," and "he's not really running for President." Hubert Humphrey is "a great grandfatherly type. My little daughter Amy sat on his lap and smudged brownie all over his face." So much for Hubert Humphrey.

Professional polls who've been observing Carter over the years say he plays rougher than any politician they know—"but not dirty."

Some people say Carter looks like the "what-me-worry?" kid in Mad magazine. But he also looks older than his 51 years these days. The last four years of campaigning have taken their toll. His eyes are the proverbial icy blue. In a sense they belie his warm manner, yet too much has been made of that. It's a cliché.

He has a highly developed sense of his own worth which is annoying to some people. There is an aura of confidence about him, a feeling that he knows exactly who he is and what he wants. He might even be described as imperious.

The South has a tradition of military men, and Jimmy Carter, an Annapolis graduate, is spawned from that tradition.

There is the military discipline and hardness combined with a politeness and gentleness, a sense of duty combined with manners and a deep religious faith indigenous to Southerners. He has the kind of dignity about him, too, that is special to Southerners—the God-and-woman, the officer-and-gentleman dignity.

He finds it difficult to talk about personal matters and he has been criticized for being too reserved, a loner.

"I've never gotten into a circle with other people," he says. "I've always been reserved, soft spoken. In a way, it's a political advantage. People underestimate me. I'm not ill at ease with people. I don't really know how to self-analyze... I don't really build a wall around myself intentionally but... for the last 10 years (since the talk with his sister) I've had a different concept of myself. I've had a quiet ability to accommodate what occurs in life. I don't have any sense of mystical destiny at all. I just feel what I'm doing is what is right to be doing."

"It's been disconcerting for me in a way to have the religious aspect of my life emphasized. Where I come from it is one of those accepted things..."

What his religion seems to have given him is a sense of calm, a serenity which seems almost unshakable. He says he rarely gets upset. "I get upset when I feel I have hurt someone or there is something I ought to have done. I felt an instantaneous hurt when I thought some of my most intimate friends had said bad things about me in a recent article. But I learned they hadn't. Criticism doesn't bother me very much. I had a problem with it five or six years ago. I used to brood over it for hours, thinking 'how can I undo this?' Then I realized there was nothing I could do about it. So I got over it. I don't think I would be bothered by it in the White House unless I thought it were true."

"I have a reservoir of strength which comes to me with my relationship with my voters. There is an intensity of commitment of the people to me. For instance, when I speak, I don't want to be interrupted by applause. It disturbs me and disconcerts me. But I think that's just my way of reacting to people."

He has been accused of being a little too carried away by the idea that he has this commitment from the people, accused of being on an ego trip, being vain. "I think that's part of it, personal vanity," he says directly. "I don't necessarily care to watch programs on TV about me and I don't run down to the newsstand the minute I hear Time magazine has a cover story on me. But I can't deny that having my campaign described in the news doesn't have some significance to me."

Carter's wife, Rosalynn, usually campaigns separately to maximize effectiveness and she isn't along on this trip.

Carter is asked how an attractive and successful candidate deals with the inevitable groupies and women who haunt campaigns. He seems embarrassed, but concedes: "I've had that problem to some degree." Then solemnly, "I believe I'm impervious to it. I hope I will be."

He quickly brings up his wife. "She and I are very close. The most precious part of our lives are when we can be alone together. We've been married 30 years," he recites. "She's the only woman I've ever loved." He stops, looks up, realizes that's a part of a spiel for which he has been criticized. He smiles, shrugs, and knocks it off.

"I saw you looking at me today and I know you were watching me kiss all those women," he says sheepishly. "But when husbands come up and say, 'Will you kiss my wife on the cheek?' it kind of embarrasses me." He didn't exactly look as if he were suffering, but his kisses did seem much like a benediction.

Does he think he is sexy? "No." Does it bother him that women swoon more over other candidates such as Teddy Kennedy?

"No, I don't believe it would bother me." He thinks it's true that he's more a family man and he thinks he can live with it.

The conventional image of a sexy man is one who is hard on the outside and soft on the inside. Carter is just the opposite. He is not a sexy man, nor is he particularly charming. When he talks to both men and women he talks to a "person"—once



By James A. Parrell—The Washington Post

he has dispensed with his instinctive Southern approach to a lady. There is a sense that he looks at people as people, rather than as man or woman or black or white.

The subject of sex outside marriage prompts a sort of schoolboy shyness. It is just a daring topic to flirt with. Prudish? Pause. "I don't think I am." Another pause. "I don't know."

He has said many times that he doesn't believe in premarital sex or extramarital sex and he is famous for not "cussing."

"I don't feel critical towards people who are divorced or lead a looser structural life," he is quick to add.

"Rosy and I are both naturally shy," he says. "She's one of the most naturally shy people I've ever known. I don't know how to explain it, how we can be shy and campaign the way we do. It doesn't come easy. I guess it's that when I go through a factory line shaking hands, every person I meet knows I really care for him."

This is where the Carter skeptics get nervous; when he begins talking about how much he loves everybody. Can a real person, a real candidate really really care for every single person he shakes hands with? He says he wants badly to care about everybody. It sounds a bit much, but it seems to be working.

Jimmy Carter's favorite sport is stock car racing. "I've been a fan for the last 30 years," he says. "When I was in the Navy in New York, Rosy and I used to go to the dirt tracks in northern New York. Then back in Georgia we used to drive down to Sebring and stay in the back of our station wagon for a few days. We'd go to Daytona a lot too. We know all the race-car drivers. When I was governor we had a banquet at the mansion every year for all the race car drivers. I don't know why I like it. I don't like to drive fast myself. I used to study different cars, I have records of automobile engines that I listen to. We know all the pit crews and the engineers. Sometimes we visit the pit crews during the races." He doesn't think the danger is what he likes. "It's not all that dangerous any more."

Yet it was the danger he liked when he was in the Navy and chose submarine duty. "I struck a fatalistic stance. I accepted the danger right at first." Carter says now that he is "afraid of nothing."

Yet he is quick to add, "I don't want to project an image of being fearless. Death doesn't concern me at all. Assassination I recognize as a possibility." He says the only time he remembers really being scared was when he was lost in the woods. "I was concerned. I think I got scared then..." and again, quickly, (always the politician) "but not enough to lose judgment."

"What I liked about being in the submarine," he says, "is that it was embryonic. There was a feeling of personal privacy because of the closeness. People respected the privacy of others more. But there was also a sharing of responsibility. It was for me, a time of unreserved masculine behavior. There was on the submarine, once we pushed off for several months, a kind of liberation from the restraints of civilized life. There was a degeneration of behavior, a closeness just among men which I liked."

"Sincerity and trustworthiness" are the two things he looks for in friends. "I despise people who lie," he says. And he doesn't like petty gossip worth a damn. "If people in my family start talking about another person who's not there I get up and leave. I just automatically put myself in their place." He is advised of Washington's grande dame Alice Longworth, whose famous needlepoint pillow, "If you haven't got anything nice to say about anyone, come and sit here by me," is the watchword of the capital. He winces. "I couldn't do that," he says.

"I don't let down my reserve too much," he says. But he does like to touch people, embrace people, hold hands. "When I feel an interest in a person I enjoy physical contact. I'm very physical with my wife."

A lot of people think Carter doesn't have a sense of humor. He catches on fast to things, but his own humor isn't cerebral. Nor does he have a dry wit. His is a banana-peel humor. Because he sees himself as a dignified person, the idea of other people losing their dignity is especially funny to him. "I don't think I'm a funny person," he says, "but I can see the humor or things when they happen. I don't consciously search for puns. What's funny to me are W. C. Fields movies."

"I respond well to jokes on me. I'm very teaseable. My wife doesn't like to tease anybody though and she doesn't like to be teased. My sons (the Carters have three) and I tease each other all the time."

Friends tell the story about how, after Carter was defeated in his first bid for governor of Georgia, he and his wife went off to a friend's log cabin for a week. Exactly nine months later his daughter Amy, now eight years old, was born. Friends tease him endlessly about the timing and he loves it.

Part of what makes him sometimes appear shy and reserved in public, he feels, is a sense that it is somehow wrong or undignified to let one's innermost feelings show.

"I have a lot of commitment to dignity. I have a lot of strong personal feelings toward dignity. Dignity is very important to preserve. Timidity may be part of my makeup, too." He pauses for a moment and adds as an afterthought: "There's a lot of difference between dignity and pomposity."

Carter feels that there is a problem in this country with people who have "a lack of security, a lack of permanence. People need to have something, at least one thing, that doesn't change around which to build. Either a husband, a job, a parent, or a deep religious faith. All of that used to be provided by a monolithic family structure. When I grew up my mama was always there; my daddy was always there. Nothing made me feel inde-

pendent or grasping. Where I live, divorce is always a disgraceful thing. People don't get divorced—if only in order to avoid deep embarrassment."

It is interesting that people like Bob Dylan, a supporter of Carter's, and Greg Allman, whose lifestyles are so different, are said to be quite close to him. "I really like rock music and Bob Dylan and I get along really well. He's very, very shy. Painfully so. I care for these people and I respect them. They are performers who lead strange lives as viewed from the eyes of a peanut farmer," he says with a laugh. "They are strange kids and yet they look on me with love. There's a closeness I feel to these young people."

One of the things Carter misses during the campaign is reading.

"The last few years I've read mostly books on politics, philosophy, history and biography plus specific books on foreign affairs, taxation and things like that. I like poetry a lot, particularly Dylan Thomas."

He says every night before he goes to bed he reads a chapter of the Bible in Spanish. "I started it in January. I have a rudimentary knowledge of Spanish and I thought that along with reading the Bible I'd refresh my mind."

His favorite pastime is walking in the woods. "I walk a lot, I like to go out in my normal clothes, blue jeans and brogans, and hunt arrow heads in the fields."

He says he never goes to the movies. He says he never watches TV. Somehow, instinctively, he understands this may not be a popular statement. He looks apologetic and finally he says, "sorry."

When the Carters are at home in Plains, Ga., they share the cooking, dishwashing and bedmaking duties equally, says Carter. "We divide the responsibility. I'm a fairly good cook. I like Southern foods: corn on the cob, collard greens and turnips, grits, fried chicken. I like plain food." He doesn't like big parties unless he's campaigning and those close to him say his favorite evening is with a small group of friends. But even then, they say, the conversation will never be entirely flip. Any evening with Jimmy Carter will end up with talking and debating ideas and issues.

Jimmy Carter sat back in his chair and surveyed the group of liberals at the round dining room table in Georgetown. It had been a long day for him and he was tired. He was particularly tired because the evening had been trying. One after another, guests at a dinner party given by AFI Director George Stevens and his wife Liz, quizzed him—some rather harshly—about his views.

They were Kennedy people, McCarthy people, Humphrey people. Some had worked for several of the candidates. They were, you might say, Veterans.

"You know," he told them in his soft Georgia accent, "you're a scared group of people."

He was right. They had been scared by the deaths of their two favorite candidates, and by the dismal failures of the other two, by the disappointments of their divisiveness and the ineffectuality of many of their liberal plans. They had lost their sense of idealism and enthusiasm and they were cynical and suspicious of anyone who could feel those things. But not just cynical. Resentful really; that someone who hadn't been through the wars with them could have the audacity to come in from nowhere and grab the prize.

Several weeks later columnist Clayton Fritchey and his wife, Polly, also had a dinner at their Georgetown house for Carter. They invited not the strategists, but the moneyed people, the establishment power figures. "It's a hardship," he would say about them afterwards, "in a way, not to have been a part of the Washington scene, but it's also an asset. Now that I've got some political stature, all those leaders are interested in meeting me. The best way to impress people like that is with victories in other places."

But Jimmy Carter just hasn't gotten in his head the way things are done here, the friends and supporters you're supposed to have, the concessions you're expected to make. He says he won't accept the notion that you have to woo the political bosses, the strategists, the power elite. He just smiles and looks you straight in the eye and says gently, "I don't need them. And they know it."

They do know it. And they don't like it. Never mind that he will always add, "I'd like to have them as my friends."

The point is that it looks like Jimmy Carter doesn't need anybody. 'Cause so far it looks like Jimmy Carter's got the folks.

There was a third Georgetown party; this one just a week ago, was a fund-raiser held, by coincidence, at Teddy Kennedy's old house. Carter stood in front of the predominantly liberal, predominantly chic crowd as the lights flashed, the cameras whirled and the reporters scribbled. "If y'all want to write me," he said, "just write to Jimmy Carter, Plains, Georgia."

He hesitated for just the right amount of time. Then flashed his big grin. "And if you can't remember my last name, why, just write to Jimmy, Plains, Georgia."

The place erupted with applause.

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